WHY DON'T OPPOSITION ELITES COOPERATE WITH EACH OTHER IN THE POST-COMMUNIST WORLD?

INTERVIEW EVIDENCE FROM KYRGYZSTAN

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Executive Summary

This paper seeks to understand why opposition elites in the postcommunist world have such a poor record of cooperating with each other. The explanations are based largely on interviews conducted with 33 members of the Kyrgyzstani opposition during the last year. Using open-ended responses and data from a questionnaire administered to the interviewees, the analysis assesses the importance of six factors in explaining the low level of opposition cooperation: the splitting tactics of the government; the ambition of opposition politicians; the level of trust between members of the opposition; the economic and everyday life conditions in the country; political values; and loyalties to kinship, ethnic, and regional groups.

Introduction

Governments enjoy natural advantages over oppositions. These include not only visibility, agenda-setting, and the control of the resources of state but also the ability to present a more or less united front against opposition forces, which are often deeply divided. Given the inherent weakness of the opposition's position, one might expect members of the opposition to maximize their cooperation with each other in order to limit the ruling elite's power and protect their own interests. This logic would appear to be particularly compelling in postcommunist regimes, where political values and institutional arrangements are unsettled and the stakes of politics are so high. Not only do the victors divide the spoils and write the rules of the political game but they can influence the financial and even personal security of opposition elites in ways that would be unthinkable in the West.[1]

Despite these incentives to work together, the level of cooperation among members of the opposition is remarkably low in the Soviet successor states. How does one explain this reluctance of the opposition to unite behind even tactical and temporary measures that could strengthen their position and restrain the political authorities [*vlast'*]? This question lies at the center of a National Council-funded project that uses several approaches to investigate opposition behavior in the postcommunist world. One of these methods is to ask opposition elites themselves to explain why cooperation with their peers in the opposition has been so difficult to achieve.

In this paper we report on the results of interviews conducted with 33 members of the Kyrgyz opposition in the period between July 2008 and June 2009 [see Appendix 1].[2] In hour-long interviews that were conducted in Russian by one or both of the authors, the respondents answered open-ended questions and completed a brief questionnaire concerning the barriers to opposition cooperation.[3] The questionnaire asked the respondents to assess, using a five-point scale, the extent to which six suggested factors complicated cooperation between members of the opposition. The respondents were also invited to provide additional explanatory factors and to assess them on the same five-point scale.

We begin the discussion of our findings with an analysis of the results of the questionnaire and then examine in detail each of the six factors that we advanced as possible explanations for the low level of cooperation within the opposition. In our analysis of these factors, we draw heavily on the observations of the respondents. The conclusion highlights additional barriers to cooperation within the opposition that were advanced by the interviewees as well as the role of institutions in sustaining an effective and unified opposition.

II. Analysis of Questionnaire Results

The questionnaire asked respondents to assess the importance of four structural and two agency explanations of limited cooperation among opposition forces. The structural explanations included the conditions of the economy and everyday life in the country; the differences in the beliefs and values of members of the opposition, evident on issues such as property rights; the ability to trust other members of the opposition; and loyalties of opposition members to solidarity groups, such as those based on language, religion, ethnicity, region, or clan. Factors based on agency covered the efforts of the authorities to divide the opposition and the personal ambition of members of the opposition, in other words explanations that emphasized the decisions made by those in the government or opposition rather than the larger political, social, or economic context.

The results of the questionnaire reveal that persons who are active in the opposition are more likely to rely on explanations of agency rather than structure in their assessment of the reasons for the low level of opposition cooperation. Table 1 illustrates that the respondents viewed the two agency explanations to be more compelling than any of the four structural factors, though the tactics of the authorities placed only slightly ahead of the structural explanation relating to trust.

As persons of action who believe they can reshape the world rather than persons of reflection who are intent on analyzing it, it is perhaps unsurprising that the respondents would highlight the importance of political actors--whether from government or opposition--instead of political circumstance. What is remarkable here, however, is the level of consensus among respondents about the role of "personal ambition" within the opposition. By making this factor an outlier in the table, in terms of the mean and standard deviation, members of the opposition seemed to be recognizing both the salience of the explanation and the depth of the divisions within the opposition. In some respects, "personal ambition" may be regarded as a proxy for the frustration that members of the opposition feel toward their peers.

The most striking finding related to the questionnaire's structural factors is the perceived lack of importance of political values as a barrier to opposition cooperation. Forty percent of the respondents believed that differences in political values had no influence, or only a minimal influence, on the level of cooperation among opposition elites [that is, they assessed it as a 0 or 1 on a 5-point scale]. Put another way, there is a widely-held view that ideas do not really matter to politicians in Kyrgyzstan, a perspective that has a deep resonance in much of the postcommunist world, where parties are ephemeral and elites coalesce instead around power networks driven by concerns about political survival and advancement rather than political beliefs. Because differences in political values are seen as a key impediment to opposition cooperation in most countries of the West, the lack of salience of this factor poses even more starkly the question of why members of the opposition find it so difficult to reach agreement in the postcommunist world.

In drafting the questionnaire, we had expected respondents to place considerable emphasis on the financial vulnerability of political elites as a barrier to cooperation within the opposition. In conditions that have more than a little in common with 18th century England, a politician without an emergency landing strip [*zapasnoi aerodrom*] in the postcommunist world is subject to many of the same temptations proffered by the political authorities, in this case not the Crown but the president. Thus, the salience of an agency explanation, relating to the splitting tactics of the government of the day, may depend in part on a structural factor emphasizing financial vulnerability. Put more simply, it may be easier to buy off the poor than the rich. Most members of the opposition questioned for this project, however, did not regard living conditions or the economic environment to be a particularly serious impediment to opposition cooperation. The mean response for the economic factor was only 2.4, though the high standard deviation--the highest among all categories--illustrates the deep divisions within the subject group on the importance of this factor.

There are few categories of analysis more disputed in comparative politics than clans and other solidarity groups. Although two of the most dramatic events of contemporary Central Asian history are associated with the politics of identity--the ethnic violence between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the Osh region in 1990 and the Tulip Revolution of 2005, which was in part a revolt by southern Kyrgyz frustrated by northern dominance--the responses to the questionnaire did not emphasize religious, regional, or kinship ties as particularly serious barriers to cooperation within the opposition.

To be more precise, our respondents indicated on the questionnaire that the loyalties which opposition members felt to their religion, ethnicity, language, region, or clan complicated efforts to unify the opposition, but less so than three of the five other factors. In the detailed analysis of this factor below, the open-ended responses given during the interviews revealed a degree of dissonance in elite attitudes about the impact of solidarity group loyalties on efforts to unite the opposition.

Teasing out the importance of social capital in relations between opposition elites is a difficult task, especially on the basis of a single, short prompt. The questionnaire asked respondents to assess the extent to which "a lack of trust of other members of the opposition (an inability to take others at their word)" complicated cooperation within the opposition. The focus of this question, therefore, was not the level of trust between strangers, which forms the basis of much of Robert Putnam's work, but rather the "trustworthiness" of those with whom one has face to face relations.[4]

Among the structural explanations of opposition disunity available to respondents, the lack of trustworthiness of fellow members of the opposition was the most salient factor and the factor about which there was the greatest consensus (that is, the lowest standard deviation). Not by chance, perhaps, it was also the factor that is arguably the closest to an agency-style explanation; it is not concerned with the broader economic, social, or ideational landscape but with the psychological environment that shapes personal interactions within the opposition. Put another way, a respondent may readily recall instances where a reliance on the good faith of another member of the opposition has not been rewarded, whereas he or she may have more difficulty in linking the influence of social, economic, or ideational factors to behavior.

Did the age, gender, or regional or career backgrounds of our respondents help to shape their perspectives on barriers to cooperation within the opposition? Although we must be cautious about reaching definitive conclusions on the basis of a relatively small pool of interviewees, a few intriguing patterns emerged in a simple bivariate analysis of the relationship between a respondent's social background and his or her views on the factors complicating cooperation within the opposition. Where men and women did not differ significantly in their responses to the questionnaire, older interviewees (those 50 and over) were far less likely to believe that differences in values were a complicating factor in opposition politics than those under 50. If 52.4% [11 of 21] of the older cohort believed that political values had no--or only a negligible--impact [that is, they entered 0 or 1 on the 5-point scale], less than 10% [1 of 11] of the younger interviewees viewed political values as this insignificant.

Put another way, the median score for values among older cohort was 1 whereas it was 3 for younger respondents--the highest differential of any of the 24 relationships examined. There was also a significant variation between younger and older respondents in their attitudes concerning the importance of sub-national loyalties as barriers to opposition cooperation. Where 36.5% [3 of 11] of respondents under 50 regarded attachments to kinship, ethnic, or geographically-based groups as serious barriers to opposition cooperation [rating it a 4 or 5], over half [11 of 21] of those 50 and over held similar views. To the extent that this generation gap signals a shift from solidarity group to ideational attachments in the younger members of the opposition, it may be an encouraging sign for the future of Kyrgyzstani politics.

Regional origin also appeared to influence attitudes toward the importance of political values and sub-national loyalties. Respondents from the less russified and less prosperous southern regions of Kyrgyzstan were twice as likely as their northern counterparts to accentuate the importance of sub-national loyalties as a divisive factor in the opposition [75% vs. 37.5% ranked this factor as 4 or 5]. Southerners were also less inclined to view political values as a serious barrier to opposition cooperation [25% southerners vs. 41.7% of northerners gave this factor a 3 or higher]. Here again the findings seem to confirm an inverse relationship between ideational and kinship or geographical loyalties, and inasmuch as loyalties to ideas rather than loyalties to place or an ascriptive identity pave the way for the rise of modern politics, one may conclude that political attitudes in the south of Kyrgyzstan are less favorable for democratic development than those in the north.

Finally, career backgrounds appear to explain some of the differences in the responses. To assess this factor, we divided interviewees into three groups: those with experience in executive office at the national level [n=15]; those with experience only in legislative institutions, at the national or local level [n=7]; and those without government experience of any kind (this group included opposition-oriented journalists, academics, and NGO leaders) [n=10]. Those without government experience were almost twice as likely as former members of the executive to view political values as a significant complicating factor in opposition politics [50% vs. 27%, with the legislative group falling between these two figures]. This is perhaps an unsurprising finding given the greater focus on political ideas of those in NGOs, newspapers, and the academy.

A significant division among the three groups was also evident in the emphasis that they placed on government tactics as a source of disunity within the opposition. Where 60% of those with no government experience minimized the importance of government tactics as a barrier to opposition cooperation [giving it a 3 or lower], only 43% of those with legislative careers and 27% of those with executive experience did so. One is tempted to conclude that these differences in emphasis reflect information asymmetries--the closer one is to the core of political power, the more likely one is to have used, or been subject to, tactics designed to suppress or divide the opposition.

With this review of our preliminary findings in place, we now turn to a detailed analysis of each of the six factors, this time supplementing the questionnaire results with qualitative materials, most notably the in-depth interviews with opposition elites. These materials allow us to present a more nuanced assessment of the factors impeding cooperation within the opposition. In some cases they supplement the tentative conclusions reached on the basis of the quantitative data alone; in other cases, they reveal the inconsistencies in the respondents' own assessments, as they struggle themselves to understand why the opposition of which they are a part has so often failed to work together.

III. The Tactics of Vlast'

There are few tactics in politics that are as ancient and celebrated as *divide et impera*. Throughout history, politicians in power have sought to consolidate their rule by dividing the opposition. Viscount Bolingbroke began his 1735 treatise, *A Dissertation on Parties*, with the observation that "to corrupt and divide are the trite and wicked expedients, by which some ministers in all ages have affected to govern; but especially such as have been least capable of exerting the true arts of government."

Bolingbroke reminds us here that splitting tactics applied to the opposition may be employed as subtle seduction or as naked corruption. In the latter case, a leader need possess no particular governing skills. In Bolingbroke's words, "A bribe, in the hand of the most blundering coxcomb that ever disgraced honour and wealth and power, will prevail as much as in the hand of a man of sense, and go farther too, if it weigh more."[5] In the view of those interviewed for this project, the political leadership of Kyrgyzstan has used not only seduction and corruption but also intimidation to prevent the opposition from uniting against the authorities.

Making concessions on patronage and policy are the traditional means by which governments seduce members of an opposition. Government compromise on matters of policy is not, however, a frequently used tactic of seduction in Kyrgyzstan and the postcommunist world, in part because most opposition politicians are not deeply attached to particular policy positions. The most effective means of seduction, therefore, do not relate to policies that could benefit constituents but to patronage that advances the career of a member of the opposition.

The attempts to co-opt opposition leaders are not always successful, of course. In the 1990s, for example, Jypar Jeksheev refused to abandon his vocal opposition to President Akaev in exchange for an appointment as minister of culture. Similarly, President Bakiev was spurned in 2007 in his attempts to quiet the opposition leader, Kubatbek Baibolov, by offering him the post of mayor of Bishkek.

However, there is a long list of opposition politicians who have succumbed to the temptations of *vlast'* and abandoned their colleagues in the opposition for high-ranking positions in government. The most notable defections, for reasons that we shall discuss below, have occurred under President Bakiev, whose regime was on the verge of collapse at the end of 2006. Since that time, Melis Eshimkanov has left the opposition ranks to become director of the state radio and television company; Felix Kulov gave up his bitter criticism of the president after assuming responsibility for the government agency in charge of small-scale enterprises in the hydroelectric sector; and Almaz Atambaev, another leading member of the opposition, accepted Bakiev's invitation to become Kyrgyzstan's prime minister in April 2007, in the midst of popular protests against the regime.[6] When Atambaev was relieved of his post eight months later by Bakiev, he rejoined the opposition, and in late April 2009 he became the opposition's unity candidate for the presidency against Bakiev. As one might imagine, he has devoted considerable energy in recent weeks to explaining the reasons for his succumbing to the overtures of Bakiev in 2007.[7]

The government's power of seduction vis-à-vis the opposition is supplemented, and enhanced, by the presence of two other "wicked expedients": corruption and intimidation. The offer of a government post in Kyrgyzstan and much of the postcommunist world carries with it not only a measure of political power and prominence but an income stream derived from rents paid by supplicants in need of government licenses, contracts, or protection. For the president and his entourage, therefore, executive posts are a formidable source of financial as well as political capital.

Besides using patronage power to co-opt or curry favor with prominent individuals, the political leadership can "churn" government posts to generate income, which was a common practice in the late Akaev era. As one leader of the opposition noted, "everyone knows how much a post costs, and how much an official can generate from that position in a year....[in some cases] it's millions of dollars." The enrichment of the political leadership and officials comes at the expense, of course, of Kyrgyzstani society, but with the media and the courts under the influence of the authorities, and with a poorly developed sense of the common weal, there is little disincentive to exploit public office for private gain.

For members of the opposition who are able to resist the attraction of political power and personal enrichment, the political authorities have at times resorted to various forms of intimidation, ranging from selective prosecution to physical violence, as a means of dividing or subduing the opposition. One of the most notable examples of selective prosecution, or in this case selective incrimination, occurred in September 2006, when Omurbek Tekebaev, former parliamentary speaker and head of the leading opposition party, Ata-Meken, was arrested in Warsaw after customs agents found heroin in his suitcase. He was released only after surveillance tapes from Bishkek airport showed that an official from the security services, which was headed at the time by President Bakiev's brother, had placed an object in his bag.

Without exception, our respondents asserted that President Bakiev has relied far more heavily than President Akaev on force or the threat of force as a political tool. They emphasize, moreover, that the Bakiev regime is now using tactics that are unprecedented in the postcommunist era in Kyrgyzstan. The first is threatening the children of opposition figures with physical violence.[8] One of the country's most prominent opposition leaders noted that "when they threatened us, it was still tolerable, but when they started to threaten our children, that really hit home [*eto uzhe oshchutimo*]. And these were not empty threats." Another opposition leader noted that there was no recourse against such threats: "you can't appeal anywhere....courts are completely under the control of *vlast'*, and they'll issue any decision to which they're ordered"

The second distinctive tactical feature of the Bakiev regime is its mobilization of criminal elements behind the politics of intimidation. A leading representative of the NGO community noted that "Akaev used law enforcement agencies for his own purposes, to suppress opponents or to get his way in business, but he didn't use the criminal world for these purposes as Bakiev is doing...now *vlast'* is using bandits...."[9] An opposition leader observed that "...Bakiev's use of the criminal world came as a surprise. And this was a decisive factor [in relations between government and opposition], because our political methods were ineffectual against the criminal world." Since March 2005, there have been approximately 30 politically or economically motivated assassinations, including four members of a 90-member parliament.[10]

The emphasis to this point has been on tactics employed by *vlast'* to divide or neutralize members of the opposition. However, intimidation also discourages officials from defecting to the opposition in the first place. As one respondent observed: "Many officials in government are guilty of sins...but *vlast'* forgives them as long as they remain in power. When they leave, they are fair game, so there is an incentive to stay connected to the authorities and not go into the opposition. Seduction and fear are inter-connected."

Perhaps the most gruesome example of political intimidation occurred in March 2009, when the former chief of staff of President Bakiev, Medet Sadyrkulov, who had been flirting with the opposition, was found incinerated in a car along with a colleague, thus leaving no evidence of the crime. A year earlier, Sadyrkulov's wife had received a package containing human body parts.[11] Such incidents send a powerful message to those who might be contemplating defection from the regime.

It is important to recognize, of course, that the authorities can overplay their hand in their attempts to seduce or intimidate the opposition or to impose overt forms of patrimonial rule. The tactics of *vlast'*, therefore, may serve to unite as well as divide the opposition. It is what a respondent called, using a term from social psychology, "the boomerang effect"--the idea that explicit attempts to alter behavior may produce a backlash. If one examines the most potent triggering mechanisms for the formation of opposition blocs during this decade, they were associated either with electoral cycles or with unpopular decisions or methods of rule of the political leadership. The latter could be a single action, such as the decision to cede Kyrgyz territory to China in the 2000 border delimitation, or the accumulated frustrations with a style of rule, which some respondents believed was the reason for the formation of a kind of "establishment opposition" to President Akaev at the end of 2004.[12]

The irony of contemporary politics in Kyrgyzstan is that the harsh tactics of President Bakiev, which were designed to neutralize and divide the opposition, are now serving to mobilize and unite it. When asked to explain the reasons for the relatively high level of cooperation within the opposition since the summer of 2008, several respondents referred to the rising level of fear among opposition elites. In this view, the closing of ranks in the opposition is a form of "self-preservation" [*samosokhranenie*]. One younger member of the opposition observed that "they [the opposition] generally unite when they all feel under threat [*kogda est' dlia vsekh ugroza*]." This comment is a reminder that rising levels of intimidation will actually trigger and deepen intra-opposition cooperation until such intimidation reaches a point where the costs of "voice" in politics become unbearable--a point that is different for each individual and society.[13]

IV. Political Values

Political values cannot be expected to bind opposition forces together in a multi-party environment of the sort that one finds in Kyrgyzstan, Russia, or Kazakhstan--or for that matter in countries outside the postcommunist world. But what is striking about postcommunist countries like Kyrgyzstan is that political values don't even bind individual parties together. In keeping with the questionnaire results cited earlier, the virtual absence of an ideational dimension in politics was raised repeatedly by respondents. "Only rarely," a respected leader of the opposition observed, "do people go into government for the sake of principles, to implement their vision for the country...." Another opposition figure noted that even "our party leaders are not bearers of political values or a particular ideology." A third respondent said that it's not ideas that drive persons into the opposition but a sense of having been wronged [*obida*]. "As a rule, they [members of the opposition] are offended because they were previously in power and then were removed."[14]

Not surprisingly, into this "ideas vacuum" flows personalist politics. Instead of mobilizing voters behind a well-crafted policy platform, opposition parties in Kyrgyzstan--and in many parts of the postcommunist world--approach election campaigns as a kind of referendum on their leader and the incumbent. In our interview with Almaz Atambaev in April 2009, he admitted that his presidential campaign would not focus on policy issues. The goal was to cast the campaign as a vote for or against the authorities. As one respondent explained, this pattern has characterized the entire postcommunist period in Kyrgyzstan--first the opposition was against the Communists, then they were against Akaev, and now they are against Bakiev.[15]

This personalization of politics may appear to facilitate opposition cooperation because it removes the ideological barriers that so often prevent opposition elites from joining forces in democratic countries. But the weakness of ideas as an animating principle in politics has had at least two negative consequences in Kyrgyzstan. The first is the declining legitimacy of politics, which is increasingly seen by the population as an unprincipled struggle for power. The results, our respondents contended, are the apathy of the electorate and its susceptibility to appeals by forces advancing alternatives to democratic politics, most notably the Islamic group, Hizb ut-Tahrir.

Compared to traditional political parties, Hizb ut-Tahrir is better-organized, more principled, in possession of more and better-designed literature, and is more likely to focus on the delivery of needed services to the population. A former member of the opposition, now a parliamentary deputy from the ruling party, Ak Zhol, commented that "in contrast to us [traditional politicians], their [Hizb ut-Tahrir] missionaries are effective. Our politicians can't even explain the most elementary things. But they work with the masses every day." Moreover, he noted, they have the advantage of using Islam, which is a unifying idea, at least among large segments of the population. Speaking of the absence among the opposition of "clearly structured ideas and a doctrine about how they would like to see the country," one journalist from the south argued that "the current opposition...could, indeed should, take a page from the religious party Hizb ut-Tahrir."[16]

Second, the personalization of politics gives full rein to personality-based conflict because politicians have little reason to constrain their ambitions if they view politics as a struggle between individuals instead of ideas. In the words of an opposition-oriented journalist, "they [leaders of the opposition] don't have a vision for what the country should be like in the future. They see only themselves in the future." This de-ideologization of politics may help to explain why our respondents attached such importance to personal ambition as a barrier to intra-opposition cooperation.

V. Ambition

Ambition is the mother's milk of politics, and so when one hears from respondents that ambition is a serious, indeed the single most serious, impediment to cooperation among opposition elites in Kyrgyzstan, one wonders if their assertions are anything more than a commonplace. Why might ambition be a more imposing barrier to intra-opposition cooperation in Kyrgyzstan and much of the postcommunist world than in democratic countries? The earlier analysis has already suggested several answers. Where personal political ambition in the West is tempered by the recognition of politicians that in order to further their own careers they must advance policies, ideas, and the interests of their constituents--each of which constrains their freedom of maneuver--in Kyrgyzstan and other postcommunist countries these considerations do not weigh heavily, if at all, on members of the opposition. As we just noted, this transforms the political struggle into a battle between personalities rather than between policies or group interests.

The relative civility of politics in the West is explained in part, then, by the ability of policy conflict to mask the contest of personalities that lies behind all political debate. This sublimation of personal aggression is not possible to the same extent in Kyrgyzstan, and therefore it is logical to attribute the decisions of politicians to personal ambition rather than to other motivations. As one respondent noted, conceiving politics as a naked struggle for power between individuals produces a model of public life based on the idea of "the victor and vanquished," or in the Soviet maxim "kto/kogo?" [who will devour whom?].

In what ways has this unfettered ambition manifested itself in Kyrgyzstani politics? In the view of some respondents, it was not the relative ease of registration but the high level of personal ambition that explained the existence in Kyrgyzstan of 105 officially-recognized political parties in a country of slightly over 5 million persons. According to one opposition activist, the refusal of party leaders to merge their small and electorally unsuccessful parties into larger unions was explained by the fact that "each person considers himself to be the center of the earth, the center of the Kyrgyz as a nation." Some attributed this attitude, and the concomitant insistence on maintaining highly fragmented political organizations, to longstanding Kyrgyz traditions, which for centuries before the Russian conquest eschewed the centralized government common to much of Central Asia in favor of highly localized political units, each of which was headed by a clan leader or "bai."[17]

In a pattern that will be familiar to any student of Russian or Central Asian politics, our respondents frequently employed the special "mentality" of the nation as an explanation of political behavior, and specifically of the high levels of ambition. As evidence of the unusual level of individualism of the Kyrgyz, one of the best-educated members of the opposition summoned up a bit of folk wisdom: "it's easier to govern 300 Uzbeks than three Kyrgyz." Another respondent called the Kyrgyz "the most insubordinate, rebellious, and mutinous nation" [*samyi nepokornyi, samyi buntarnyi, samyi miatezhnyi narod*] in Central Asia.

Although as a broad category, "mentality" or even political culture is difficult to employ as an analytical tool, certain features of a group's "mentality" or social values may illuminate elements of the political landscape.[18] For example, when our respondents highlighted the importance of ambition, what did they believe members of the opposition sought to achieve? The few who addressed this question directly asserted that status, and not political power or economic rewards, was the ultimate goal of politicians. And not status on a national level, but status among one's own relatives and local community.[19]

An opposition leader who had significant experience in government noted that in Kyrgyzstan there "was a psychology that if you part with your post [*dolzhnost'*], your life has ended [*propala tvoia zhizn'*]....If you aren't a big official, it means that it's over, it's the end of the world [*u tebia vse, konets sveta*]."[20] Just as the desire to acquire the status of a government office makes opposition leaders vulnerable to the overtures of *vlast'*, it also discourages officials already in power from leaving their posts to join the opposition, which does not usually offer the same status rewards.

The graying of the opposition leadership may also be discouraging compromise among ambitious politicians. Not only "does every second person see himself as president," but "each thinks about his age." With the majority of prominent opposition figures in their late 50s or beyond, there is a growing sense that their biological clock is ticking, and they have only one or two electoral cycles remaining. Much like other post-colonial countries, the elite with experience in politics at independence is aging in place, and while those in government and opposition struggle to maintain or claim (or re-claim) power, they deny rising generations the opportunity to make their mark in public life.

There are parallels here to the late Brezhnev period, when long-serving party and government elites blocked the rise of ambitious younger leaders. Our respondents found it very difficult to identify promising younger politicians who might succeed the departing generation, one of the many consequences of the lack of strong parties, which are the natural training grounds for the rising political elite. Conditions in the realms of business and politics in Kyrgyzstan are such that those interviewed for this project believed that the most talented and ambitious members of the next generation had already left the country for opportunities in Kazakhstan, Russia, or the West.

VI. Trust

Another irony of Kyrgyz politics is that extensive personal contact between members of the opposition seems to have done little to heighten levels of trust. For two reasons, personal relations between opposition elites have been closer in Kyrgyzstan than in Russia and most other postcommunist countries. First, the small size of the country and its capital ensure that many members of the political elite have had common formative educational and political experiences and frequent face-to-face contacts.

Second, because lavish celebrations of personal milestones--marriages, funerals, and even birthdays--form an important part of Kyrgyz culture, there are many more opportunities for contacts in social settings than one would find in Russia or countries in the West.[21] One respondent believes that the level of social interaction is unusual even for Central Asia. Although he is a deputy from the party of power, Ak Zhol, this politician noted that "I go out freely with the opposition; I drink beer with them. In Kazakhstan, they would kick me out of parliament for such behavior." Another respondent complained that it was unseemly when not a single representative from *vlast'* turned up to celebrate the birthday of his aged father.

The opportunities for contact in informal settings was evident in late April 2009, after the *kuraltai* [popular assembly] in the village of Arashan had nominated Almaz Atambaev as candidate for president. After several hours of speeches and entertainment, a dozen leaders of the opposition had a private and very relaxed lunch in a yurt near the meeting grounds. Although some of the toasts seemed unenthusiastic, it was the kind of event that would be almost unimaginable in most countries, where relations among political leaders are more distant and formalized. In Putnam's terms, then, the Kyrgyzstani political environment creates considerable opportunity for "bonding," that is intense relations among persons with similar social backgrounds, which normally facilitates the formation of social capital.

Where responses to the questionnaire identified a lack of trust as a significant impediment to cooperation among members of the opposition, the comments of the respondents focused less on trust among opposition leaders than between the population and the opposition. According to several respondents, recent actions by certain opposition leaders had severely frayed the bonds of trust that had existed between the opposition and the electorate.

For some, the turning point in the relationship was the events of April 2007, when popular protests were followed by the entrance of Atambaev into the government and the virtual disappearance of Felix Kulov from the political scene. This was a moment, declared a veteran leader of the opposition, when we squandered our "last chance to unite the opposition." Thereafter, "people simply turned away in disgust, saying the opposition is no different from the government [*liudi prosto plevali, govorili, kakaia vlast', takaia u nas oppozitsiia*]." When Atambaev joined the government only weeks after having called President Bakiev a "political corpse" [*politicheskii trup*], people started asking "how was it possible to deal with a corpse?"

These comments serve as a reminder that the legitimacy and survivability of a regime is not just dependent on its methods of rule or the underlying social and economic conditions but also on the perceived alternatives to the status quo. In recent years, low levels of trust between opposition elites and between these elites and their potential supporters have denied Kyrgyzstan compelling alternatives to the existing regime. The result is what Richard Rose and Neil Munro called a low-level equilibrium trap (bad governance creates the expectation of more bad governance), a condition from which it is very difficult to escape.[22]

VII. Economic Conditions

Contrary to our expectations, in response to the questionnaire interviewees did not identify economic and everyday life conditions as potent barriers to opposition cooperation. While the broad terms in which the question was posed may have suppressed the importance assigned to this factor, it is also clear from the open-ended responses that most members of the opposition did not regard the financial vulnerability of the population or the elite as a particularly compelling explanation of the divisions within the opposition.

Indeed, several respondents argued that at times this vulnerability facilitated cooperation; witness the selection of a unity candidate for president in the spring of 2009. Because running a presidential campaign in 2009 was such an expensive proposition, the only viable opposition candidate was the one who could finance his own run for office: Almaz Atambaev. In the absence of well-organized and well-financed parties, other ambitious and visible candidates had little choice but to back Atambaev if they wished to present a united front against the incumbent president. As one prominent NGO head explained in reference to the most popular opposition politician, "Tekebaev isn't a rich man, and because he has limited financial means, it forces him to form a union with other politicians."[23] In an interview with us, Tekebaev himself admitted that his party, Ata-Meken, "had been forced to unify with a new party, Ak Shumkar, which included wealthy individuals...," in order to contest the 2007 parliamentary elections.

Respondents also argued that most leaders of the opposition were successful enough financially to fend off crude attempts at bribery by the authorities. In the words of one deputy, the parliament that served from early 2005 to the end of 2007, which included numerous opposition politicians, was a "completely oligarchic parliament" [*stoprotsentnyi oligarkhicheskii parlament*]. Another respondent noted that a seat in parliament granted deputies not only immunity from prosecution but connections and protection. "Each [deputy] has a bazaar or factory or business interests around Bishkek. And those who came to office without a business got one within six months." In many cases, therefore, current opposition leaders used their earlier service in government or parliament to guarantee a measure of financial security for themselves and their family.

Although most leaders of the opposition may be persons of considerable means, the source of their livelihoods is usually tied directly or indirectly to *vlast*'. Members of the opposition with existing businesses are dependent on the government for protection, and many successful business persons who sympathize with the opposition are discouraged from participating in politics for fear of reprisals against their firms.

For example, the owner of a restaurant on the outskirts of Bishkek was threatened recently with a forced sale of his property for well under market value because of his involvement in opposition politics. Ata-Meken Party leader Omurbek Tekebaev noted that business persons "are afraid that if they win an election under our banner, they will have problems, and if they lose, the problems will be even worse." In many cases, therefore, our respondents recognized that the rules governing economic life strengthen the hand of the authorities in their use of tactics designed to suppress or divide the opposition.

VIII. Identity Politics

Does loyalty to solidarity groups, based on such categories as kinship, region, ethnicity or religion, complicate cooperation between members of the opposition in Kyrgyzstan? In open-ended comments during the interviews many of those who had given this explanation a low value on the questionnaire provided evidence which suggested that identity politics had a defining role in relations between members of the opposition. For example, after assessing identity politics as only marginally significant on the questionnaire, one respondent introduced us to elders from various northern clans who met regularly in an adjoining room to strategize about how to prevent excessive southern influence in Kyrgyzstani politics.

This same dissonance has been evident in the published comments of prominent opposition politicians, who want to believe--and want outsiders to believe--that the country has transcended solidarity groups. When asked about conflict between such groups, Felix Kulov claimed in one interview that "clans are not opposed to each other" [“nikakogo protivostoianiia klanov net”]. In another interview, however, he noted that "there are some regions where the election results may lead to anger or conflict on grounds of clan or religion."[24]

The conclusions of Kathleen Collins about identity politics apply with particular force to Kyrgyzstan: "The conditions of post-colonial and post-Soviet state development allowed clan elites to entrench themselves in political and economic power while their new nation states were still weak."[25] Many of our respondents pointed to the central role of kinship networks in Kyrgyzstani politics. In the words of one politician interviewed for the project, "It's not constitutional bodies but informal institutions that govern, including [networks of] relatives....This has become so ingrained that people seek relatives to resolve their problems, and so they have turned into official lobbyists."

Ties based on kinship and/or geography also help to shape the development of political institutions. One respondent asked, "Who is in political parties? In general, it's the relatives and *zemliaki* [fellow local residents] of the leader. And this undermines broader support, because people see that if they come to power their [the leader's] kin will win." Another interviewee noted that the Kyrgyz are so conscious of wide circles of kinship that it encourages multiple parties where people support a party "not on the basis of ideology but kinship ties."

It is not just kinship, of course, but local and regional ties that shape political networks in Kyrgyzstan. We would argue, in fact, that geography has played an even more important role than kinship in the development of Kyrgyzstani politics in the postcommunist era. President Akaev's reliance on fellow northerners to govern the country for a decade and a half created a backlash from southern Kyrgyz which, when combined with widespread disillusionment with the administration of elections and the interference of the Akaev family in business life, resulted in the March Revolution of 2005. As one northern respondent argued, "the main slogan [of the revolution] was that the northerners...deceived and impoverished us [southerners] for 40 years... [and so] let's throw out the northerners, seize the land and wealth and we ourselves will govern."

The aftermath of the March events only deepened the north-south divide. Although the country's leaders initially sought to achieve a measure of regional peace by creating a power-sharing arrangement in which a president from the south, Kurmanbek Bakiev, ruled in a "tandem" with a prime minister from the north, Felix Kulov, the equilibrium was short-lived. As the president consolidated power at the expense of the prime minister, opposition forces from the north attempted to amend the constitution to introduce a parliamentary republic, which would have shifted power from the president toward the prime minister and parliament. The failure of this effort, combined with the resignation of Kulov and the replacement of many mid- and lower-level northern officials with southerners, left many northern Kyrgyz feeling disenfranchised and embittered.[26]

One of our respondents recounted an incident that she regarded as a typical reflection of inter-regional tension. On hailing a taxi, she was asked by the driver about her regional background before she was allowed into the cab. He explained that he was no longer willing to pick up southerners because many of his relatives had been fired from government jobs to make way for southerners. A northern politician interviewed for the project confirmed that the regional factor "had intensified during the last year. Previously we weren't terribly put out [*my osobo ran'she ne vozmushchalis'*]. But today very many responsible posts are openly going to southerners. And this is building up [tension] in the north to the breaking point [*skol'ko zhe, do kakikh por eto mozhno*]."

Although another respondent noted that "the regional factor has been used at times as a trump card by political actors to threaten and beat each other," the dangers of unchecked regional tensions have also encouraged mainstream forces in the opposition to build inter-regional coalitions and to make symbolic and practical concessions to regional interests. Most leading opposition parties today have their primary electoral base in the north, but they are sensitive to the need to incorporate southern politicians into their ranks. When we asked Azimbek Beknazarov, a leading opposition figure from the south, how voters from the south would respond to the candidacy of Almaz Atambaev, a northerner, he explained that he and other southern politicians in the new opposition coalition would vouch for Atambaev among supporters in their respective districts.

This last comment serves as a reminder that all politics is very local in Kyrgyzstan, where the most powerful geographical attachments are not to the nation, or to the north or the south, or even to one of the country's seven regions, but to one's district or village. This localism has the advantage of assuring politicians not only of a base of electoral support but also of a "posse" of guardians who can be mobilized to descend on the capital with yurts and banners to defend their native son or daughter against attack by the authorities. Beknazarov's supporters from the southern district of Aksy were at the center of the most bloody and celebrated local "uprising" in 2002, but other provincial politicians have benefited from the defense of *zemliaki* in their home districts or in Bishkek.[27]

Localism is therefore one of the most potent checks and balances in the Kyrgyzstani political system. For all of its shortcomings, localism also has the advantage of limiting attachments along north-south lines because northerners and southerners are divided internally by region and district.[28] It would be inaccurate, however, to understand localism in Kyrgyzstan as a product of political culture alone. Through more than a decade and a half and four electoral cycles, politicians came to the national parliament in Bishkek as representatives of single-member districts, and thus the electoral arrangements themselves encouraged a strong attachment of politicians to territory.[29]

Now that the country has moved to a parliament based entirely on proportional representation seats, politicians in the government and opposition are adjusting to the new rules of the game. For example, in an earlier campaign, Temir Sariev had criticized the settlement of southerners in his northern single-member district; running for office under PR rules in December 2007 encouraged him to reach out to southerners and abandon rhetoric that exacerbated regional tensions. Thus, changes in the country's institutional design have the potential to reshape loyalties based on solidarity groups.

The evidence adduced above illustrates the centrality of sub-national loyalties to Kyrgyzstani politics and some of the ways in which these loyalties complicate cooperation within the opposition. For example, the prominence of identity politics encourages in politicians a sense of self-sufficiency; their support, at the local level at least, is based on a group of citizens that does not have to be won over by political ideas or argument. Instead, the politician seeks to prove that he or she is one of them. This focus on identity creates a hostile environment for the emergence of integrative organizations and ideas. Powerful identities based on region, district, and kinship do not, however, preclude the opposition from working together toward common goals. There have been moments in the postcommunist era--the last year is a clear example--when opposition leaders from various ethnic, regional, and religious backgrounds in Kyrgyzstan have presented a relatively united front against the ruling regime. In fact, the most serious division within the opposition at present has less to do with geographic or kinship loyalties than with personal and even ideological disagreements--Temir Sariev, the wealthy young leader of perhaps the only party with a clear platform, Ak Shumkar, refused to support the united opposition candidate, Almaz Atambaev, who is a fellow northerner, and threw his own hat in the ring.

IX. Final Thoughts

Besides "mentality" and political culture, respondents offered several other explanations not included in our questionnaire for the difficulties that the Kyrgyzstani opposition forces have had in cooperating with each other. One of the most compelling of these was the under-institutionalized character of political parties. One respondent even went so far as to call the leading opposition party, Ata-Meken, a fiction. By this she meant that the party lacked basic organizational and management skills, a factor identified by several respondents. Because parties were little more than the personalities that headed them, they were unable to develop a predictable set of policies and tactics that might facilitate stable forms cooperation with other organizations.[30]

There was also a reluctance, some respondents noted, for party leaders to compromise, a trait that one interviewee argued was a legacy of "Bolshevik thinking." A prominent interviewee argued that "the complete collapse of the opposition" in parliament began at the end of 2006 when Omurbek Tekebaev refused to cede a few committee chairmanships to opponents in order to ensure a majority for the opposition. Having held out for all committee chairmanships, the opposition ended up winning none. Almaz Atambaev called this the "all or nothing" approach that was typical of the opposition.[31]

Even with all the impediments to cooperation identified above, leaders of the Kyrgyzstani opposition would almost certainly have worked together more productively if they had been more accountable--either to their own party members or to the public. However, the problem, as one respondent noted, was not just the lack of feedback mechanisms that promote accountability, such as mature political parties or fair elections, but the minimal expectations of the public. In the words of an opposition party leader, "our population is not very demanding with regard to the actions" of politicians.

People don't mind corrupt politicians, he argued, as long as they aren't too corrupt, that is that they "receive only as much as you can afford." He concluded by saying that "it's precisely this unprincipled character of the electorate...that allows politicians to change their positions on a whim." To employ the terminology of Juan Linz, Kyrgyzstan does not have an opposition but a "semi-opposition." In his view, “the main difference between a semi-opposition in an authoritarian regime and an opposition in a democracy is the lack of accountability...to potential organized or unorganized ‘constituencies’.”[32] Thus, both the institutional and cultural environments have provided opposition leaders with enormous freedom of maneuver, which they have tended to use to forge effective alliances with each other only during moments of great vulnerability or opportunity.

Finally, the very instability of political life in Kyrgyzstan has discouraged the development of what Charles Tilly called the "invisible infrastructure of shared meaning, rules, practices, and social relations" that could sustain an institutionalized political opposition instead of simply personal or kinship networks.[33] This instability results in part from the frequent circulation of elites into and out of the opposition--a product of both the tactics of *vlast'* and the ambition of individual politicians.

But the instability is also due to the rapidly-changing institutional arrangements in postcommunist Kyrgyzstan. As one opposition leader observed, "Beginning in 1991, we constantly changed the rules, including the constitution... The shape of the executive branch and judiciary is constantly changing," and, he noted, the size and basis of electoral representation of the parliament has changed four times. He concluded by arguing that "until stable state institutions are created, there will not be a single consolidated opposition." Few tactics of *vlast'* may be more effective in keeping the opposition off balance than the periodic revision of the country's institutional design.[34]

Table 1

	Vlast' Tactics	Economics	Values	Ambition	Loyalties	No Trust
	5	4	4	5	5	2
	3	2	2	3	2	2
	2	2	4	5	2	2
	2	2	3	4	4	5
	4	2	3	5	4	4
	5	5	0	5	4	5
	5	0	0	5	4	4
	5	0	0	5	5	5
	4	1	1	5	3.5	4
	5	4	5	5	3	4
	3	0	0	5	3	3
	5	3	0	4	4	3
	4	0	0	5	0	5
	2	3	5	4	3	3
	2	4	1	5	2	4
	5	4	0	3	3	3
	2	3	3	5	1	5
	3	3	2	4	4	2
	5	2	2.5	5	3	4.5
	3.5	5	4	5	2	4
	3	1	1	5	2	3
	5	2	2	3	4	3
	4	0	2	5	5	3
	5	2	2	5	2	5
	4	2	2	5	4	4
	3	1	1	5	5	4
	4	5	4	4	2	5
	3	3	2	5	1	3
	2	2	3	4	4	5
	3	5	0	4	4	3
	4	2	3	4	3	3
	5	3	2	4	2	3
SUM	119.5	77	63.5	145	99.5	117.5
MEAN	3.734375	2.40625	1.984375	4.53125	3.109375	3.671875
STANDARD DEVIATION	1.117925	1.538249	1.533401	0.660699	1.260793	0.996944

Appendix 1

List of Interviewees

Abdirasulova, Aziza
Abdrakhmanov, Omurbek
Abdyldaev, Myktybek
Akimov, Turat
Akun, Tursunbek
Alembykov, Erkin
Aliev, Emil'
Alymkulov, Bolot
Atambaev, Almaz
Babakulov, Ulugbek
Baibolov, Kubat
Bakir uulu, Tursunbai
Beknazarov, Azimbek
Beshimov, Baktybek
Bulekbaev, Erkin
Dzhakupova, Cholpon
Imanaliev, Kanybek
Imanaliev, Muratbek
Ismailova, Tolekan
Jeenbekov, Ravshan
Kadyrova, Raia
Kurmanov, Zainidin
Masaliev, Iskhak
Masaulov, Sergei
Niiazov, Miroslav
Oshurakhunova, Dinara
Otunbaeva, Roza
Saparbaev, Joomart
Sariev, Temir
Sasykbaeva, Asia
Seidakhmatova, Chinara
Tekebaev, Omurbek
Zheksheev, Zhypar

ENDNOTES

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[1] On the goals, structures, and tactics of the "oppositions" in Russia, see V. Ia. [Vladimir] Gel'man, "Political Opposition in Russia: Is it Becoming Extinct?", *Russian Social Science Review*, vol. 46, no. 4 (2005), pp. 5-30. For other work on the opposition in Kyrgyzstan and the postcommunist world, see Romana Careja (ed.), *Stumbling but Struggling: Political Opposition in Four Post-Soviet Countries* (Moscow: Strategy, 2004), and Tamerlan Ibraimov, "Mesto i rol' oppozitsii v politicheskoi sisteme Kyrgyzstana," Perspektiva (Analiticheskii konsortsium), October 2006.

[2] The issue of the representativeness of the sample is moot because we were able to interview virtually every major figure in the political opposition in Kyrgyzstan. Funding for the July 2008 interviews was provided through a travel grant from the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX).

[3] All interviews were tape-recorded and most were then transcribed in Russian. All but three of the interviews were conducted in Kyrgyzstan. In one instance, a brief initial interview in Kyrgyzstan was followed up three months later by an extended interview with a respondent in DeLand, Florida, and in two other cases interviews were conducted in Washington, D.C. In one case a respondent answered fully all of the open-ended questions but then refused to complete the questionnaire.

[4] Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); see also Russell Hardin, *Trust and Trustworthiness* (NY: Russell Sage, 2002).

[5] *Bolingbroke: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 3.

[6] A former leader of the opposition, Melis Eshimkanov, claims that Atambaev had reached an agreement to join forces with Bakiev as early as November 2006. "Melis Eshimkanov: Dukh oppozitionnosti zhivet v kazhdom iz nas," Xpress.kg, July 17, 2009 (http://xexpress.kg/2009/07/17/melis-jeshimkanov.html).

[7] Just before announcing his candidacy, Atambaev printed 1000 copies of a booklet in which he justifies his acceptance of the prime ministership in 2007. He contends that (1) the other leaders of the opposition had encouraged him to serve as their representative in the halls of power and (2) the late 2006 revisions to the constitution gave the prime minister unusually broad powers that he expected to be able to use to check the actions of the president. See *Almazbek Atambaev: Tri Interv'iu Zhurnalistu Leile Saralaevoi* (Bishkek: 2009). His view of this affair differs from that of other members of the opposition interviewed for this project.

[8] Destroying the career prospects of the offspring of opposition leaders has also become a fairly common occurrence. A former foreign minister, for example, recently moved her son to neighboring Kazakhstan after the authorities made his position in a leading Kyrgyzstani firm untenable. The authorities have also begun criminal proceedings against close relatives of several opposition leaders, including the son and brother of Alikbek Jekshenkulov, the former foreign minister, and the son of Azimbek Beknazarov, the former procurator-general.

[9] See Erica Marat, "Criminalization of the Kyrgyz State before and after the Tulip Revolution,*" China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2008), pp. 15-22 (www.isdp.eu/files/publications/cefq/08/em08kyrgyzstanstate.pdf) When Professor Huskey interviewed Omurbek Tekebaev on Lake Issyk-Kul' in August 2008, Tekebaev pulled his pistol from his pocket and laid it on the table before the interview and then pointed to the Kalashnikov on his nightstand. He said that such measures weren't necessary in the Akaev era, when he could walk at night and go out to restaurants without fear. He also noted that where wealthier opposition leaders have security teams, he was reduced to ensuring his own security.

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[10] The leader of one opposition party stated in the interview that in 2006, Prime Minister Felix Kulov came into the office of Omurbek Tekebaev, then the speaker of the parliament, and in the presence of several deputies stated: "Tekebaev, leave office, or [President] Bakiev will shoot everyone, he'll shoot deputies." The same respondent claimed that the then chief of the presidential staff, Usen Sydykov, told Tekebaev that if he didn't resign as speaker, he would "send 200-300 women from OBON [*otriad bab osobogo naznacheniia*] and they would physically kick him out of his office." OBON--literally Specially Appointed Group of Women--is a play on words. OMON are the special security forces in Russia.

[11] Sadyrkulov had served under both Akaev and Bakiev as chief of staff, and several respondents expressed a grudging admiration for him as a professional who had the ability to serve as a go-between government and opposition. He may in fact be regarded as the main "seducer" of the opposition, and the hardening of policy after his death may reflect in part the absence of a figure to push for and carry out policies of seduction rather than intimidation.

[12] Elites in Kyrgyzstan found especially frustrating the constant shakedowns of businesses by members of the Akaev family and their treatment at election time. In the words of Jusupjan Jeenbekov, "I was one of the close circle around the Akaev family, but after what they have done to me...in the elections, I will never work with them or this government again. They built me up, and then gave me over to the opposition." “Kyrgyzstan: After the Revolution,” International Crisis Group, Asia Report no. 97 (May 4, 2005), p. 4.

[13] Robert Dahl argued that governments will use coercion to prevent the rise of effective opposition "in every instance where the governing group has a fair chance of succeeding and the gains of a successful denial will exceed the costs." Robert A. Dahl (ed.), *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies (*New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. xii. We doubt that the calculation is quite so simple. For a discussion of the ways of differentiating oppositions, see ibid., p. 332.

[14] As one interviewee pointed out, most of the opposition leaders had grown up in the Komsomol and the Communist Party and only in their old age did they have the experience of being in the opposition, which is very difficult for them.

[15] Personalist politics is not, of course, the sole preserve of the postcommunist world. The Americanization of election campaigns has tended to focus attention on personality rather than policy, and it is worth reminding ourselves that although ideas clearly animate politics in France, the French have a half-century old tradition of parties of notables, where powerful personalities--from de Gaulle, through Mitterrand, Chirac, and now Sarkozy--have been instrumental in defining the party.

[16] Paul Queen-Judge from the International Crisis Group makes a similar point in Ol’ga Vlasova, Ekaterina Kudashkina, “Komu Nuzhna Kirgizii,” *Ekspert*, April 14, 2008, pp. 95.

[17] In a pattern found in other postcommunist countries, and in the people's democracies after WWII, the authorities have formed new parties in order to siphon support away from existing opposition parties. Such was the case with the creation of a parallel Communist Party, whose name is little different from the original CP inherited from the communist era. See “I. Masaliev: ‘U Kyrgyzov Voobshche Dovol’no Netraditsionnye Predstavleniia o Politike,” November 6, 2007 (http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php4?st=1194303300)

[18] Political culture as an explanation for varying levels of dissent and opposition by country has a long pedigree. Albert Grosser argued that "a Frenchman typically, is more disposed to oppose, less disposed to support the government, any government." Cited in Robert A. Dahl (ed.), *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies*, p. 353. Dahl contends that there are four "culturally derived orientations toward politics," based on the orientation toward the political system, other people, cooperation and individuality, and problem-solving. Ibid., pp. 353-4.

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[19] It is important to recognize that oppositions will differ by country in terms of their assessment of what constitutes success or victory. For an analysis that highlights the differences in political discourse and values between the West and Russia and the postcommunist world, see Alexander Lukin, *Political Culture of Russian Democrats* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[20] A related issue is the desire of former politicians to get back in the game. One veteran politician, who had been in government and opposition, justified the compromises made to return to power by saying to a colleague: "I was tired of running around on the streets, I had worn out so many shoes, and I got fed up with this life, and of course I needed a place, so I'm thankful that I'm back in parliament." Another respondent also emphasized the psychological difficulties of the opposition politician. He noted that there's a Bolshevik attitude of those who are not for us are against us. And therefore it's not that the person desires to return to the feeding trough [*kormushka*], but that everywhere "people are afraid to have contact with you, they don't speak to you...and so they've created a zone of isolation around us."

[21] See Matthew Fuhrmann, "A Tale of Two Social Capitals: Revolutionary Collective Action in Kyrgyzstan," *Problems of Post-Communism* (November/December 2006), especially pp. 18-20.

[22] See Richard Rose and Neil Munro, *Elections without Order: Russia's Challenge to Vladimir Putin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 218-9.

[23] However, because this union was based largely on financial necessity, it has not led to vigorous support for Atambaev's candidacy. Indeed, given his poor showing in the campaign, several ostensible allies within the opposition have been distancing themselves from Atambaev. The most cynical view now current in Bishkek is that some opposition leaders supported Atambaev's candidacy knowing that the campaign would discredit him as a future presidential contender.

[24] Viktoriia Panfilova, “Oppozitsiia Kirgizii ne Poidet ni na kakie Kompromissy,” *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, March 30, 2007, p. 6; Cholpon Orozobekova, “Kyrgyzstan’s Clannish Voters,” IWPR, December 23, 2005.

[25] Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 343. See also Edward Schatz, *Modern Clan Politics: The Power of "Blood" in Kazakhstan and Beyond* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004).

[26] Most of the proponents of a parliamentary republic appeared to be motivated by concerns about good governance rather than regional *revanche*. The atmosphere in the country was such, however, that the proposals could be interpreted by some southern politicians as a means of realigning power in favor of the north.

[27] For an excellent study of localism related to the Aksy events, see Scott Radnitz, "Networks, Localism, and Mobilization in Aksy, Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 24, no. 4 (2005), pp. 405-424.

[28] Given that the Kyrgyz, especially in rural areas, tend to know their ancestors to the seventh generation, it is difficult to separate local and kinship ties. One politician explained to us that "half the people in his district are relatives...Although I don't know everyone by name, they know that I'm their relative and that we are the children of a common father or ancestor. And therefore they are obligated to support me."

[29] Not all politicians contesting single-member districts, however, were native sons and daughters. Felix Kulov ran in the Kara-Bura district of the Talas region in 2000 and had a strong showing.

[30] John Ishiyama and Ryan Kennedy note that party development in Kyrgyzstan was extremely limited even by postcommunist standards. See Ishiyama and Kennedy, "Superpresidentialism and Political Party Development in Russia, Ukraine, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan," *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 53, no. 8 (2001), p. 1184. Obviously, the

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weakness of parties is also explained by the unwillingness of the government to conduct fair elections and enforce rules that encourage party development.

[31] "Almaz Atambaev, Eks-primer-ministr KR: Ia nikogo ne Boialsia, krome Boga," *Tazar*, April 22, 2008 (www.tazar.kg/news.php?i=8561). Almaz Atambaev argues that if the opposition had compromised and joined a coalition government in April 2007, the country could have avoided a deeper slide toward authoritarianism.

[32] Juan J. Linz, "Opposition in and under an Authoritarian Regime: The Case of Spain," in Robert A. Dahl (ed.), *Regimes and Oppositions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 193.

[33] Charles Tilly, *Trust and Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 38-9.

[34] Among the many changes to the electoral law that have discouraged opposition cooperation were rules adopted in 2007 that forbid electoral alliances--the only option parties now have is to merge if they wish to contest elections under a single banner. There is now speculation in Bishkek that the government will change the electoral rules, yet again, this time re-introducing 40 single-members district seats in addition to PR seats.